Author's response to reviews

Title: Are pediatric Open Access journals promoting good publication practice: An analysis of author instructions

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Rachel Neilan,

we would like to thank both reviewers for their helpful and valuable comments. We revised our manuscript accordingly and feel that it has improved further. Please find our point by point response below.

Reviewer: Tove Faber Frandsen

Reviewer’s report:

Major compulsory revisions:
The study is based on a very small data sample and includes very few variables. The authors state in their comments to the reviewers: “Given the exploratory nature of our study with a focus on guidance given by journals and limitations of the data set, we did not attempt to establish any causal relationships.” It should be made more explicit in the title and/or the abstract that the authors consider their study to be of an exploratory nature and that there is made no attempt to establish any causal relationships. The focus is consequently on establishing grounds for further research into author guidelines.
We now mention the exploratory nature of our study in the “conclusions” of the abstract. The corresponding section now reads:

„Pediatric OA journals mentioned certain recommendations such as the Uniform Requirements or trial registration more frequently than conventional journals; however, endorsement is still only moderate. Further research should confirm these exploratory findings in other medical fields and should clarify what the motivations and barriers are in implementing such policies."

The study should (with respect to the limited sample size) include control variables that describe the two groups of journals with respect to more than type of publisher, geographical location and open access status. Are the two groups of journals only different in terms of these characteristics?

We have included some additional information on the DOAJ journals (publication language and starting year of journal; beginning of the Results section) and the JCR journals (Table 2, Discussion section) in the text. Our study did not aim at describing in detail any differences between JCR and DOAJ pediatric journals. Therefore, we did not include a large set of variables for comparison of these two groups.

Instead, we aimed at describing what kind of guidance pediatric open access journals give and, secondly to compare the findings with those from JCR indexed journals analyzed earlier.

Given the small sample size and the number (as well as the level of detail) of the variables included in the study I think the authors should consider including more fields or more detailed data in their study. At this point in time it is not as interesting as it could be.

As mentioned in the Discussion section we included all pediatric journals from the DOAJ registry and believe that enlarging the group of journals to other specialties would have made the analysis less interesting for readers in pediatrics.

We plan to work on other specialties, e.g. oncology, in the future, but feel that including other specialty journals here would not have yielded important additional information.

Reviewer: Sara Schroter
Reviewer’s report:

The revisions have improved the paper but I still have some comments.

Thank you.
Major compulsory revisions:
3) “We therefore set out to elucidate the coverage of these four domains Uniform Require-
ments, trial registration, conflicts of interest and reporting guidelines of good publication
practice in Open Access pediatric journals and compare the results with findings from
“conventional” JCR-indexed pediatric journals.”
This objective implies that you will make a direct comparison. It is not clear enough in the
paper where the results from the JCR journals came from. There should be a clear state-
ment in the methods about this dataset and a reference. Currently this information is buried
in the Introduction. The data from the JCR analysis should be presented for comparison.

We now have a statement at the end of the background and in the methods section giving
information about this dataset and give the reference to our previous study. Data from the
JCR analysis are now presented in Table 2.

4) New results are discussed in the Discussion section that do not appear in the Results eg
results of the geographic analysis.
Thank you for this valuable comment. We now moved the respective paragraph to the re-
sults section. The new heading is now “Analysis according to geographical location of edi-
torial office and category of publisher”

5) Discussion – “We assume that our results are not specific to pediatrics and may be
found if reproduced in journals from in general medicine or other specialties”
You can not make this assumption. We simply do not know if the results are generalisable
to other disciplines.
We agree and rephrased this sentence to be more cautious. It now says: „One might
speculate that the situation is similar in journals in general medicine or other specialties.
Future studies including other than pediatric journals should be undertaken to determine
whether our results can be generalized to other Open Access journals.“

6) The paper would benefit from a table of results. Data from the JCR journals could also
be included.
Results for the group of Open Access pediatric journals are presented in table 1 which we
hope was available to the reviewer. We have added table 2 presenting results for the JCR
journals.

Minor essential revisions
1) The following statement on p6 should be referenced:
“It has been argued that electronic Open Access publishing does not change significantly
content and quality of research articles but improve access to research findings”
A reference to “Mackenzie Owen J: The Scientific Article in the Age of Digitization: Springer, Netherlands; 2007” was added here.

2) p6: “We wondered whether journals adopting this new publication model might be more keen and flexible in taking up the above-mentioned recommendations.”

This study does not assess whether the journals are “keen”. To do so you would need to interview the editors. This word should be removed. Indeed the word flexible is not really appropriate throughout.

We removed the word “keen” and “flexible”: The respective sentence now reads: “We wondered whether journals adopting this new publication model take up these recommendations, which aim to ensure publication of research results in an unbiased and transparent manner.”

Yours sincerely,

Joerg Meerpohl, on behalf of the co-authors